

Illustrated by Philip Lyford



A young man found a black face gazing placidly at him, and departed with a yell of fright.

The distinguished author of "The Proof of the Pudding" and many other noted stories here writes in his best vein the blithe tale of a wild night in the career of a plump, versatile and amiable gentleman.

McGillicuddy

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

WHEN Roger G. McGillicuddy, having reached the age of forty-eight, sold his interest in the well-known drygoods house of McGillicuddy, Parkin & Company, he was merely checking off the first item on a list of things he had long intended to do. No threatened physical collapse, no warning from nerve-specialists, precipitated his retirement. A tendency to obesity was to be watched, but otherwise his doctor assured him of at least twenty years of comfortable life.

McGillicuddy was short, stout and bald, but though he was not blessed with an heroic figure he was nevertheless a person who inspired respect. No one ever thought of calling him "Fatty;" no one slapped him on the back. A forthright manly fellow was McGillicuddy, a gentleman of ideals, but broadly tolerant of human frailty. He had been a generous contributor to the visible supply of hope and cheer in a world that treated him well. Now that he was free, his bachelor state made it possible for him to elect where he should live, and his soul yearned for a community where the bright guidons of youth fluttered in clean stimulating air. It was not for Roger G. McGillicuddy to sit in club corners with the aged and infirm and listen to discussions of dyspepsia and rheumatism cures. If a man is as young as he feels, McGillicuddy was only twenty-five.

As the adopted uncle of the children of half a dozen old friends scattered over the country, he had kept in touch with youth, and running up to Cornford to see the young Watsons, who had just married and settled there, he at once decided that that charming Connecticut town was just the place for him. Barring a few large estates which had been held by the same families for so many years that the owners could afford not to be snobbish, Cornford consisted largely of a type of the young and ambitious that appealed very strongly to McGillicuddy.

A week-end with the Watsons in their red-roofed bungalow, which was linked to Phil's studio by a path Jean had adorned with hollyhocks, awakened in McGillicuddy a longing to possess a dupli-

cate of their compact establishment in which to woo contentment and keep in touch with the sons and daughters of the fine arts, and the agreeable young business men of the Cornford colony.

"How jolly to have you settle here, Uncle Roger!" cried Jean when McGillicuddy broached the subject. "It's the cheeriest place in the world. Even last winter when we'd just come and everything was new and strange, we had plenty to do—such marvelous hospitality! We use the country club house in winter as much as in summer; plenty of dances—and you know you adore dancing! The amateur theatricals are really wonderful. Nearly everybody in the colony is interested in something, and you hear a lot of wonderful talk here."

"If I come," said McGillicuddy, smiling benevolently, "it will be because you're here. And I know you will vouch for me and put me in the way of knowing your friends. But I shouldn't want to be a nuisance—"

"Why, Cornford was created for you! You'd fit right in to everything," Jean declared. "Our friends would simply adore you, and you could be an uncle to all of us, that is if you wouldn't make me jealous."

"Come to think of it, Jean, that Tom Gordon house on the hill road might do for Roger," suggested Watson. "Tom built it with the money he made out of 'The Quitter,' the play that had the long run and is still going. But he's fallen for the movies now, and I just heard today that he's going to stay in California. The house is only two years old, somewhat bigger than this, on a quiet side road and with five acres of land—trees, garden and every little thing."

The thought of McGillicuddy in the Gordon place, which had the most bewitching brook tumbling down right in front of the house, brought Jean to a state of ecstasy. She hadn't heard before that the Gordons weren't coming back.

"Maybe—" She turned to Phil, who like a well-educated husband anticipated her questions.

"Right you are, Jean! They want to sell it furnished as it stands—everything included from the door-mat to the ice-cream freezer."

"Their things are lovely and just as good as new. The Gordons turned the whole business of furnishing and decorating over to Fanny Maury—she's the latest fad in that kind of work—and there isn't an ugly or uncomfortable thing in the house."

Phil busied himself with the telephone to find out just how negotiations might be opened, and got the name of an agent in Stamford who was the authorized representative of the Gordons. The next day Jean drove McGillicuddy over in her runabout to inspect the place. The house was tucked away on a wooded hillside and the brook came singing down the hills just as Jean had said it did. Even with the jacketed furniture contributing its note of forsakenness, it was possible to see that here was a place that invited the presence of all those amiable deities that preside at firesides and create the atmosphere of home.

When McGillicuddy suggested that the house was bigger than he needed, Jean convinced him that it wasn't at all too large, for he would probably want to have friends out for week-ends. And the dining room with its French windows looking off across the hills was perfectly heavenly; and then too was the study, where Gordon had written his plays, which had the cutest fireplace ever fashioned, and—

"You've missed your calling, Jean," said McGillicuddy. "You'd make a wonderful real estate agent. I'll get you to drive me to Stamford to-morrow and close the deal."

EVERY man who climbs into the forties with any sort of spirit or curiosity left in him feels a call to tackle something or other that is wholly out of the orderly course of his life. With some it is an ambition to make a graceful, witty speech before an admiring audience; others, wholly without experience in politics, would fain hold a public office of dignity and trust; still others are secretly beset with a desire to manage an inn—something small and exclusive that would offer all the comforts of home. McGillicuddy had, like most men, dreamed that he would one day figure in a stirring adventure, perhaps rescue a lovely woman in distress. But his own really individual secret aspiration was to appear once—once would satisfy him—as an actor; it was not, however, in the field of the legitimate drama that he pined to disport himself, but as a blackface comedian. All his life he had firmly believed that if he had the chance, he could duplicate the success of the blackface stars in the glorious period when negro minstrelsy touched perihelion.

By the first of October, McGillicuddy was so comfortable and contented that he began to feel that he had been born in Cornford and had lived there all his life. Everyone liked him—he was so agreeable; and his assumption of responsibility for the education of a caddy whose widowed mother down in the village couldn't take in washing any more by reason of chronic rheumatism, had already won him the affection of all Cornfordites.

It was about this time that the Jim Hendersons and Fred Shipleys dropped in on McGillicuddy one evening with a

well-feigned air of making the most casual neighborly visit.

"By the way, Mr. McGillicuddy," ventured Henderson when he had screwed his courage to the sticking-point, "we four are the committee for the dramatic club. It doesn't seem fair to pounce on you right at the jump, but we're in a sad mess."

"We certainly are!" laughed Shipley. "Our committee's tackled something much harder than pulling off a play—we're going to open the season with a vaudeville bill, and we want you to help."

"It really won't be hard at all!" Mrs. Henderson threw in. "And we wouldn't ask you if we weren't sure you could do it."

The guileless McGillicuddy didn't know that it's the time-honored custom of a dramatic club committee to bait the trap in just this fashion when they're desperate and have a part to bestow which has been rejected by all the other available talent. But Henderson, being wise in his generation, now realized that here was a prospective victim with whom it was better to deal in a spirit of frankness.

"Now, Mr. McGillicuddy, to put all our cards on the table, we thought we had the bill all arranged with everything we needed, from the acrobatic stunt Bob Newton's going to do, through a typical program in the best style of the twice-daily, winding up with Ned Rangeley—son of the banker, you know—who has a fox-terrier kennel and has been training a bunch of dogs all summer for this show."

"Oh, we don't mean to put you in an act with the trained dogs!" exclaimed Mrs. Shipley, watching McGillicuddy anxiously and not understanding that his face had paled not from resentment at what might prove to be an assault upon his dignity, but from deep concern lest these advances might not after all lead to one of the great desires of his heart.

"But," he ventured with a deprecating wave of the hand, "I'm not even an amateur! To be sure, when I was a young fellow I found it amusing to sing a little—barber-shop chords with a quartet—in my native town, Council Bluffs, Iowa, but—"

"There you are!" cried Henderson with a glance of triumph at his co-conspirators. "You were one of those boys who hang around Main Street on summer nights and get harmony! I might have known it from your speaking voice."

"You do speak beautifully," murmured Mrs. Henderson.

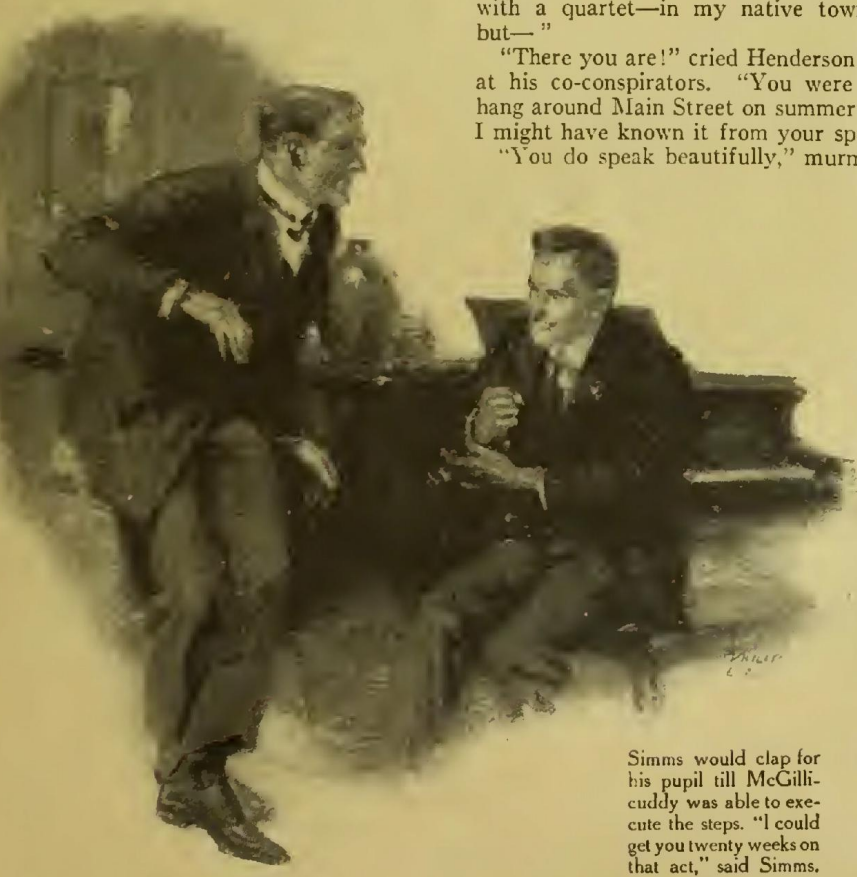
"Of course, we wouldn't be bothering you if we thought you couldn't score big," said Henderson, warming to his work. "And the act we're here to offer you is something you can work up by yourself, and do in your own way—the more so the better. That's one of the best things about getting up a vaudeville show—you don't have a big cast to fight and keep in order. There'll be a dress rehearsal the night before the show just to be sure everything works smoothly, but for the rest of it, you're your own master."

McGillicuddy's heart fluttered with the agitation of a girl who has just heard her first proposal.

"Do you honestly think I could? And"—he wondered whether they detected the tremor in his voice—"just what—what would you have me do?"

"Oh, don't be angry," cried Dolly Henderson when she saw her spouse hesitate. "But it's a blackface act we thought you could do beautifully, particularly now that we know you can sing!"

"Blackface!" repeated McGillicuddy, wondering whether they were mind readers taunting him with the realization of a life's ambition. "Such parts are—difficult—"



Simms would clap for his pupil till McGillicuddy was able to execute the steps. "I could get you twenty weeks on that act," said Simms.

"Oh, not for you, Mr. McGillicuddy!" chorused the committee hopefully.

"You're paying me a great compliment," he replied gently, half-fearing that now they had placed the boon within his reach they might snatch it away. "Surely there's some one better qualified—some younger man—"

"There's no younger man than you in the club or in the whole world for that matter!"

This from Mrs. Shipley, who was twenty-three, was enormously satisfying. He was trying to think of a reply when Dolly, who knew exactly when to close an interview, rose.

"It's so nice of you to consent! But I said I knew you wouldn't turn us down when we counted on you so much!"

They were all shaking hands with him and telling him he had saved their lives and that the bill was now complete and they hoped he'd call on them for any assistance they might render. And then—they were gone, whizzing down the drive as though fearing he might repent.

The show was only a fortnight distant and McGillicuddy at once became a man of action. A day in New York sufficed to bring him in touch with Tom Simms, an old hand at blackface whose performances McGillicuddy had often watched with the keenest relish and envy. Simms being broke and without bookings, readily accepted McGillicuddy's generous offer. The idea of coaching a retired business man of McGillicuddy's figure for a blackface part tickled him, and he manifested an intelligent and sympathetic interest in McGillicuddy's ambition as they faced each other at luncheon in the White Goods Club.

"Better stick to old stuff," the professional advised. "You can't educate an audience in fifteen minutes, and you don't want to risk a minute more than that. Do the patter first and then edge into the song. Might be better," he added, appraising McGillicuddy's girth with a critical eye, "to spout the patter with a slow hitch-walk—to keep it from getting monotonous. Hold yourself calm-like till you've pulled the song so you wont part like a winded hound when you sing. Then you come back sort o' absented-minded-like and do your dance as though you'd just happened to think of it."

McGillicuddy had always supposed that the dusky comedians of his adoration wrote their own patter, and he was deeply interested when Simms bore him to an upper room on Broadway where he bought from a specialist in that form of literature six yards of manuscript monologue as carelessly as though it were only so much calico.

Simms and three battered trunks were established at Cornford the following evening. Simms proved to be a thoroughly companionable fellow, and McGillicuddy rejoiced to be playing host to a man so amusing and so rich in reminiscences. When Simms would light a fresh cigar after recounting some disastrous experience on the road and exclaim, "But it's the only life!" McGillicuddy felt that he had spent far too many years studying credits and watching the woolen market.

At the end of a week Simms expressed his entire satisfaction with his pupil's progress. McGillicuddy was to go on the bill as Hezekiah Mazooma, a professor of astronomy out of work. A mustard-colored waistcoat with glass buttons as big as walnuts was the most prominent feature of his costume. A silk hat of an ancient block, a tall white collar and flowing red scarf, a patched and frayed frock coat, trousers in huge black and white checks, scarlet socks showing above a pair of elongated shoes—thus arrayed and with his face blacked and his head covered with a kinky wig, by his finger-prints only could Roger G. McGillicuddy have been identified as a former member of the firm of McGillicuddy, Parkin & Company.

"Say," exclaimed Simms with a grin of approval, "I'm sorry for the act that follows you!"

SIMMS taught McGillicuddy the patter line by line, giving him the proper intonations and gestures. The song was not difficult, as McGillicuddy really had something of a voice, and Simms sang with him till he could carry the tune alone. As McGillicuddy had never given up dancing and had the light step of most stout men who dance at all, Simms concentrated on this feature of the act. He would stop hammering the piano and clap for his pupil until finally McGillicuddy was able to execute the steps without accompaniment of any kind.

"Guess you've got that about right," Simms remarked finally. "Just hold 'er right there. I'll bet money I could get you twenty weeks on that act. And if you wasn't so well fixed, I'd tease you to go out with me. You certainly put it all over the last partner I had."

Simms had agreed to remain at Cornford till after the show, but near the end of the second week he was called away by an imperative summons to Kansas City to take the time of one of the fraternity whose act had failed to make good. However, McGillicuddy clung to him to the last minute in order that the Watsons might view his act while his preceptor was still within reach.

"I'm going to telegraph Papa to come on for the show!" cried Jean after witnessing McGillicuddy's performance. "He'd never forgive me if I let him miss seeing you! That dance is perfectly marvelous, Mr. Simms! And when he pulls his hat over his eyes just before his exit and sticks that big cigar in his mouth—well, I'll simply pass away."

"I guess they'll set up, all right!" said Simms grimly. "It's a thirteen-minute turn, and there aint a dead second in it."

And so Simms departed into the West, much richer than he came, followed by McGillicuddy's gratitude and fervent good wishes.

AT the dress rehearsal McGillicuddy was a pattern of ease and confidence. He had made up at home, down to the minutest detail, and drove himself to the club in his smart new runabout. He had carefully measured the stage in the big ballroom and was satisfied of its solidity and knew by experiment on several quiet mornings just how many steps would get him off with his dance. When his turn was called, he merely went out and did his act exactly as he had been doing it under Simms' direction at home.

The committee was exultant. Even though the one-act play hadn't turned out well, and Sam Trenton's sleight-of-hand tricks were a little old, and Tommy Stedman and Ethel Marston weren't as smooth as they might have been in their musical number, McGillicuddy was a tower of strength against which nothing could prevail. He was a grand old sport to go to so much trouble just to please them; several very pretty girls told him that he was just too sweet. And the young men chaffed him and told him he was a great fraud for pretending to be a novice, for surely at some period in his life he must have been an actor.

"I like your nerve in driving over with your warpaint on!" said Henderson. "If your machine broke down and you had to get some honest Connecticut farmer out of bed, you'd just about scare him to death!"

"It would be a pity to do that," replied McGillicuddy, with a smile which his blackened face made so grotesque that the admiring group of which he was the center laughed uproariously. "It's more comfortable to make up and clean up at home. And as for my face, I'm protected by the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution."

"If I'd got my make-up down as fine as you have, I'd stick to it till after the show," remarked Ned Rangeley, who was feeling good because his terriers had acquitted themselves splendidly.

"Would you have me sleep with this stuff on my face?" demanded McGillicuddy good-naturedly. "At the present price of linen, it would be expensive."

"I'll pay you for all damage to your pillows and bet you a hundred dollars—the winner to turn the pot over to the French orphans—that you wont stay dressed up till tomorrow night's show!"

"Don't do it, Roger!" Watson intervened. "You need to rest, and that stove-polish effect must be uncomfortable."

"Not at all," McGillicuddy replied. "It would please me to see Rangeley contributing to so worthy a cause as the French orphans, and I accept the bet."

"Does that mean that you're going to sleep in that costume? Don't let Ned tease you into making so foolish a bet," pleaded Jean Watson, who had just joined the group. "Ned, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"It's a perfectly good offer," said McGillicuddy. "You may always trust me to keep myself comfortable. I will appear here at seven-thirty tomorrow night just as I am, without having washed my face or taken off my shoes."

"The most I can hope for," Rangeley laughed, "is that some old friends will knock at your door suddenly tomorrow morning and find you transformed into the king of the Congo."

"I suppose it will not be breaking my contract with Rangeley if I leave my stage hat here," McGillicuddy remarked as Jean turned up the collar of his ulster. "It's so high I can't drive in it."

"Of course, Roger; and do take care of yourself! If you should be sick tomorrow, the show would be a dismal failure."



"I've told Ned everything!" she said. "But how can I ever thank you!"

WITH his usual thoroughness McGillicuddy had pondered the maps of southeastern Connecticut till he could find his way about in the dark. His roadster was a car of power, and having mastered its intricacies, he was not in the least disturbed by the thought of becoming marooned. There was a shortcut from the club-house to his home, and though the road was rough, he usually chose it for the wilder fling of the landscape by day and the joy of a certain hill which at night touched the sentiment in him with an unobstructed view of the stars. He had never in his forty-eight years felt better. He threw down the windshield to enjoy the bite of the keen frosty air, and bent to the wheel with a grin on his face. An old moon gazed at him benignantly, and the great phalanx of stars seemed to draw him under their special protection.

In his nocturnal flights over these roads he had rarely encountered anyone. As he shifted gears for a steep descent, he was surprised to find the lights of a machine glaring at him from the foot of the hill. The violent whirr of the engine indicated that

the unknown traveler was in trouble; and McGillicuddy, cautiously directing his own car, speculated as to just what he could do to assist him. The driver of the stranded car, seeing the machine descending, dimmed his lights and planted himself in the middle of the road.

The plight of the machine he was approaching so filled McGillicuddy's thoughts that he forgot his disguise, a fact of which he was forcibly reminded when he brought his car to a standstill and the driver of the other machine peered in at him and bellowed to a companion as yet unseen:

"It's a ducky! Keep quiet and let me manage him!"

The voice betrayed irritation. And McGillicuddy, who never permitted himself to be irritated about anything, was grieved that anyone should be annoyed even under the provocation of a breakdown at midnight in a lonely road.

To the superficial observer, at least, he looked undeniably like a negro. The man in the road was a stranger—McGillicuddy was satisfied of this, and McGillicuddy decided that it would be inex-

pedient to attempt to explain that his affiliation with the dark races was only temporary. But he was immediately made aware that it was not the purpose of the gentleman in the road to enter into conversation. For with a quick gesture the fellow flourished a revolver before the handsome brown eyes of the astonished McGillicuddy.

Pistols had never figured in McGillicuddy's life. He was not afraid of them; he was merely mistrustful of all such symbols of violence, and he had made it a life-rule to avoid them as he avoided fried meats and bad investments. Simms had taught him a negro stage-dialect, which though it would never pass muster with the laborious students of negro speech, might assist him in establishing himself as a consistent character with this fellow.

"Doan shoot, boss! Please doan shoot!" he cried, holding up his hands in their big driving gloves.

"Shoot, you miserable fool! I have no intention of shooting you! But I've got to have your car; do you understand?"

"I gets you, boss!" admitted McGillicuddy meekly.

"Whose car is this, and what are you doing up here at this time of night?"

"I's just been taking a guest home from my boss' house. They was havin' a li'l poker-party, suh!"

"Well, I got lost coming through the hills, and my engine's gone bad, and I've got to get to Stamford in a hurry."

"Yes suh," McGillicuddy assented.

"I'll pay you well for taking me over there. I guess you can carry three?"

"Guess I kin do that all right, boss!"

"Turn round and be mighty quick about it! I've got a lady with me. Do you understand?"

McGillicuddy agreed to everything, though he understood nothing except that he was pressed into a service that might or might not be to his taste.

"If you try to bolt, I'll pump six nice little bullets into you! Do you get me?"

"I suttingly do!" said McGillicuddy, blinking as the pistol was again brought to his attention.

The gentleman who had commandeered his car in this high-handed manner was young—not more than twenty-five, McGillicuddy surmised. In spite of his bold front, he betrayed a nervousness a casual mishap on the road hardly explained. It occurred to McGillicuddy that with a little patience the refractory engine might be brought to its senses, but a hint to this effect only evoked a sharp rejoinder from the young gentleman that he had no time to waste in tinkering the machine.

Again bidden to turn his car, McGillicuddy did so, not without difficulty, as the road was narrow. The evolution executed, he found his captor waiting for him with the companion to whom he had referred. The headlights gave McGillicuddy a fleeting glimpse of a young woman heavily veiled, with a polo-coat buttoned tightly about her slender figure.

"All right now," said the young man briskly, when he had helped the girl to a seat beside McGillicuddy. "Just a minute till I get our suitcases."

A suggestion from McGillicuddy that he would stow the suitcases in the locker was promptly rejected.

"Don't move or I'll blow your head off. It'll only take a minute, Grace."

WHILE the excited young man was at work at the rear of the car, McGillicuddy turned on the dash-light to inspect his speedometer and measure the day's mileage against his supply of gas. Thus occupied, he was astonished to hear a sob from the passenger beside him—a sob tremulous and pitiful that instantly challenged his sympathy. He made bold to turn toward her, and through the veil met the gaze of her dark eyes luminous with tears searching his own pleadingly. In his haste the young man was making awkward work of storing the bags.

"Want me to help yuh, boss?" called McGillicuddy, sticking his head out of the car.

"No; stay where you are!"

Thus admonished, McGillicuddy drew in his head. Immediately he became conscious that a hand had touched his arm, a singular thing, indeed. She was overwrought, tired, unhappy, perhaps in need of aid. He was vastly pleased by that light touch on his sleeve. Adventure stirred in McGillicuddy's blood. Here might be an opportunity of which he had dreamed, a chance to test his mettle in a romantic situation.

There was a moment's silence, save for the grumbling of the young gentleman behind, and the purring of the engine; then the veiled face bent toward him and she whispered brokenly:

"I can't go on! It's all a terrible mistake. I want to go—home!"

"Suttinly, miss; yo' doan need to go no place you doan wan' to!"

This, also, in a whisper, with all the kindness and assurance McGillicuddy could give the words. She was appealing to him with the confidence of a child, as though knowing instinctively that in spite of his dusky countenance, he possessed a kind and generous heart. And this was pleasing, enormously pleasing and stimulating to the soul of McGillicuddy.

The lid of the luggage-compartment banged warningly.

"We're eloping—we are going to be married—but I want to go back! Please—please help me!"

"You jes' trust me, li'l girl; I goan to help you!" McGillicuddy replied hurriedly.

The young man sprang into the car, forcing the girl a little closer to McGillicuddy.

"Burn 'er up now! We've lost a lot of time!"

"All right, boss; I'll sure do the best I can!" McGillicuddy answered amiably.

AN order for speed at the foot of a hill from a gentleman who had just failed to negotiate that identical ascent was ridiculous, but McGillicuddy ignored it. With a sure hand he gained the top, circled round the country club to avoid the possibility of an encounter with any belated members, and found a road which if followed would connect with a thoroughfare that led directly into Stamford.

"No foolishness! I don't know these back roads, but if you play any trick on me, it's going to be the worse for you!"

"I was jes' thinkin' maybe you'd rather keep off the main roads," McGillicuddy replied with a chuckle Simms had taught him.

"That's all right, but be sure you know what you're doing!"

McGillicuddy knew exactly what he was doing, or more strictly, he knew what he hoped to do. He did not like being ordered about in this cavalier fashion; and even more, he did not like the idea of a girl being carried away and married after the enterprise had ceased to interest her.

Now that they were on their way, the young man addressed himself to the girl.

"It's all coming out right, Grace. That infernal car never acted up before. Everything's ready for us at Stamford. I telephoned Bill Wakely at the Pilgrim Garage to be right there with everything set. As soon as we're married, we'll skip right on to New York."

To these assurances Grace made no reply. Whatever had prompted her flight, it was enough for McGillicuddy that she had repented. The manner in which she had whispered the word *home*, with the quaver of a homesick child, had touched him.

Connecticut slept the sleep of the righteous. They met no one, and when they struck a smooth strip of road, McGillicuddy exacted the highest speed from his machine. But he was thinking intently, covering every possibility of failure in effecting the safe return of Grace to the home from which her lover had beguiled her.

He must appear to be confident of the way, and yet as his plan took definite form, he decided that it would better suit his purpose not to appear too sure. He slowed up once to flash his spot on a sign and hesitated, muttering to himself. The few minutes' delay again aroused the lover's wrath, and he abused McGillicuddy roundly for his stupidity.

A quarter of an hour passed with easy going. McGillicuddy studying the landscape carefully to keep his bearings. Then a red light glimmered ahead, and a moment later it caught the eye of his male passenger.

"Here's a nice mess! I thought you said you knew these roads!"

"This road was all right yestiddy, boss! It suttingly am strange about that light."

He stopped the car well away from the light, and raised his spot-light to survey the road beyond. To the right of the cross-ways there was a strip of excellent road that would lend itself well to his purpose.

"Guess I better have a look out yonder, boss. Maybe we can get through."

"You black fool, you wouldn't know a road if you saw it! I'll take a look at it."

"Jes' as you say, boss!" replied McGillicuddy humbly.

"Detour four miles right," the young man read from a sign beside the light, and in his rage he seized the unoffending lantern and dashed it violently to the ground. (Continued on page 126)

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"Throw your spot on the signboard!" he yelled.

But McGillicuddy had already swung to the right and quickly had his car flying along the road.

"Doan be scared honey! Keep you' head down!" he cried after a hasty glance behind.

The crack of a pistol was echoed by a snap of the wind-shield as a bullet that had crossed McGillicuddy's shoulder bored a hole in the glass. The girl had fallen to her knees, and McGillicuddy's right hand held her down until a second pistol-crack sounded faintly behind.

Through the window of the rear curtain McGillicuddy saw the young man following, a swift-moving shadow soon left far behind.

"All right now, honey! You doan need to be scared o' nothin' no mo'."

When she sat erect he saw that she was crying again; this would never do.

"Doan cry, li'l girl! You better tell me now where you want to go. That man aint never goan to get you. He's got some business gettin' hisse'f home from heah!"

He guffawed loudly, and the joke of her late suitor's embarrassing situation evidently touched the girl's own humor. She laughed and they turned toward each other and laughed again.

"I'm so silly," she said. "What made me do it! I was hating him and hating myself before we had gone a mile!"

SILENCE was maintained until McGillicuddy stopped the car at a road which, if followed, would land him in Cornford. The girl hadn't yet indicated where she wished to go, but it was clear to McGillicuddy that a decision on this point must be reached immediately. Her next words pleased him; they proved her to be unselfish and of gentle heart, and she uttered them in a tone he found charming in its sincerity.

"He tried to shoot you," she said. "And I'm awfully, awfully sorry!"

"Oh, that's nothin', miss. It doan scare this ole niggah to be shot at!" And he reproduced the Simms' chuckle.

"You're a dear angel! I shall be grateful to you all my life!" she cried.

"Doan you worry about that, miss. What fo' you run away?"

"I was just a silly little fool; that's all! My name is Grace Trimble, and I live in Hartford. I've been visiting my cousins in New Canaan, and George is my aunt's chauffeur, and I thought—I thought—I was in love with him. I'd only known him two weeks; isn't that ghastly! And there was a party tonight, and afterward I was going over to Cornford to visit the Rangeleys, and so George said we might as well go on down to Stamford and be married, and I ran away from the dance and—and you know the rest!" she ended breathlessly.

"Yes, miss."

"But he was so rough and not nice at all, and I knew I'd made a terrible mistake; and that's why, that's why—"

She was again at the point of tears; and he hastened to prevent a further inundation of her bewitching eyes.

"You-all done jes' right!" he exclaimed. "That was jes' Providence takin' care o' you, li'l girl, when you' machine busted and I comes along!"

"I suppose it was," she admitted with a gulp.

"But the Rangeleys wont understand why I didn't come, and they'll telephone my aunt, and if Papa and Mamma find out how near I came to running away, they'll never trust me again."

"I guess anybody's got to forgive a li'l girl like you! You want to go back to you' aunt's at New Canaan?"

"Oh, that will take so long, but I ought to let Mrs. Rangeley know."

"Guess that's right, miss. They sho'll be worried when you doan show up!"

McGillicuddy was a practical man; and to deliver the girl to her New Canaan relatives would be to disclose the cause of her failure to report at the Rangeley's, a thing to be avoided if it could be done. To carry her direct to the Rangeleys at that hour would not do. He knew them only slightly, and he would be sure to bungle the business if he attempted to lie to shield the girl; and she must be shielded; there was no debating that. His judgment on this point was confirmed by his companion's next remark, let fall with the most innocent candor.

"I was almost engaged to Fred Rangeley at York Harbor last summer; and I do care a lot for him, and his family are so nice; but after this—"

"Oh, you'll done forgit all about this li'l circumstance befo' you's a day older."

As McGillicuddy offered this consolation, he decided upon a course of action. The girl must be placed immediately under the protection of a woman who would care for her and assist in covering up her escapade; and Jean Watson, his ideal of a resourceful and diplomatic woman, occurred to him instantly. Jean, he was satisfied, would manage everything, quieting the fears of Miss Trimble's relatives and accounting to the Rangeleys for the delay in her arrival. Jean was just the person to minister to a girl in distress. To rouse anyone else he knew, would be to publish the whole thing; and he reflected with misgivings that in his black

paint and stage costume he was not in a position to stir up a strange household with a runaway girl on his hands.

"They's a lady—awful nice lady at Cornford that'll take care o' you!"

"A—a white woman, do you mean?" she asked apprehensively.

"Bless you, yes, a frien' o' the folks I wo'ks fo'."

"Well, if you're sure it will be all right—"

"You be dead sho', miss, it's all right, or I wouldn't take you-all theyeh."

THE Watson Airedale lifted a long howl as McGillicuddy sent the car spinning up to the bungalow. It was slightly past two o'clock and the dog's fury was not without justification.

A prolonged attack on the bell resulted presently in the lifting of a window.

"That you, Phil!"

"It certainly is; who the devil are you?"

"Me—Roger! I'd like to speak to you a minute."

The front door opened, disclosing Watson in his bath wrapper.

"Good Lord, Roger, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, that is, nothing much," said McGillicuddy, dropping his dialect. "I picked up a girl who was eloping but changed her mind about getting married. Lives at Hartford—visiting relatives at New Canaan. Car broke down; I picked them up, and she cried—really she was terribly sorry and wanted to get out of it. I'll tell you the rest sometime. Just now I want Jean to be nice to the girl."

"Where is she?" demanded Phil.

"Out there in my machine."

Watson darted upstairs, meeting Jean at the landing.

"How romantic!" McGillicuddy heard her exclaim. "And Roger is still in his make-up—how perfectly screaming!"

"All right, Roger!" she called cheerily. "Send her right in!"

"I came away in my party dress, and I'm awfully cold!" Miss Grace Trimble's teeth were audibly chattering as McGillicuddy helped her out of the machine. Jean was at the door waiting to welcome her guest, and without ado hurried her upstairs.

"Now, Roger, you've got to come in; you have no business running around in this fashion," said Phil.

"Thanks, no! You have only one guest-room; I'll push on home. Just a moment; there's some luggage, half of it belongs to Miss Trimble."

"You're certainly breaking all records," said Phil as McGillicuddy handed in a suitcase marked "G. T." Here was a new Roger, a Roger G. McGillicuddy possessed of an undreamed-of spirit and dash. That he should be cruising about with his make-up on was funny; but that he should have added to his blackface rôle that of knight errant was a matter for laughter.

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remarked McGillicuddy. "You'd better hurry and give the tip to Jean. I don't want that girl to know I'm not a colored chauffeur."

Watson grinned as he watched McGillicuddy tranquilly light a cigar.

"All right; your secret is safe with me! I'll say this for you, Roger: your taste in girls is good. I got only a glimpse, but she's certainly a credit to the human race."

"I noticed it," replied McGillicuddy, and he walked away, carrying his head high, as was pardonable in a man who has met adventure face to face and proved his merit in the encounter.

WITH his teeth clenching the cigar, McGillicuddy set off with an agreeable consciousness that he had done a good night's work. He was surprised to find himself not only unwearied, but refreshed and exultant as though he had drunk from the fountains of youth. He, Roger G. McGillicuddy, had been fired upon, a fact supported by the hole in the windshield. A very foolish young man he considered Miss Grace Trimble's aunt's chauffeur, and McGillicuddy hoped he had learned a profitable lesson. The recollection of his chagrin at the frustration of his plans kept a smile on McGillicuddy's face as he drove, a little recklessly and dare-devilishly, feeling that fate rode with him.

The aura flung over the top of a hill by the lights of an approaching car brought him to attention. He dismissed instantly the thought that the discarded lover might be in pursuit, for that young gentleman could hardly have found a machine and picked up the trail so quickly.

The oncoming car came to a standstill, and four men jumped out and planted themselves across the road. Two of them carried objects which, to McGillicuddy's surprised vision, looked very much like shotguns. He stopped short and watched them approach in open formation. Only a few nights earlier, bandits had held up a motorist near Litchfield, and it was wholly possible, he reflected, that he was to be the victim of a similar outrage. One of the men jumped on the running-board of the roadster and flashed a hand-lamp upon McGillicuddy's imperturbable dusky countenance.

"It's that damned coon!" cried the leader. "Orders was to look out for a fat ducky, and this is our meat!"

"Fits the description all right," said another of the party.

"How much whisky you taking down this time?" asked the leader.

"Aint got no lickah," McGillicuddy protested.

"Don't try that on us! We been lookin' for you! Driggs, dig into the back of the car, and I'll see what's under the seat."

"You-all makin' a big mistake. If you think I'm a whisky-runnah, you go ahead and fin' the goods."

Two men were fumbling in the locker; one stood on the running-board, and the other opened the door on the driving side and profanely bade McGillicuddy climb out.

"Turn off your engine first, you blank skunk!"



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"Jes' gimme a minute, boss; you-all got me kind o' flustered!"

Pretending to have difficulty in shutting off the engine, McGillicuddy gained a moment in which to weigh the chances of escape. His headlights defined his captors' machine as a much lighter car than his own. To bolt and leave it intact would be to invite a chase which might result in disaster, as he had found when he stopped at the Watsons that his gas was running low.

"No monkey business; shut that thing off!"

McGillicuddy replied by "stepping on it." The car leaped frantically at one of the officers who was planted in its way, hurling him into the roadside. The man on the running-board went sprawling after him, while the two who had been looking for concealed alcoholic beverages in the locker clutched madly at the receding car.

THE roadster, with twenty yards in which to gather speed, struck the officers' machine a neat glancing blow on its nose that sent it into the ditch. McGillicuddy felt his car quiver as it rebounded but it resumed its flight as though sharing its owner's intolerance of impediments of every kind. Profiting by his earlier experience of the night, McGillicuddy bent low over the wheel, and not too soon. The shotguns boomed gloriously as though they were saluting a field marshal, and a shower of hail swept the machine. McGillicuddy's first thought was of his tires, but in their fury the foe had aimed too high, and the car rolled smoothly on. Half the windshield had ceased to exist, and McGillicuddy was seized suddenly with a curious desire to scratch his back.

He was headed for home, and the thought of home was alluring; but as he might be a murderer, for all he knew as to the present physical condition of the gentleman he had caromed into the roadside, he decided that it would be extremely dangerous to seek his own domicile.

He had gone several miles when by unmistakable signs he became aware that his gas was running low. He could not leave his car in the highway where the hounds of the law would find it, and obtain a definite clue to his identity; the remaining motive power must be conserved to hide the roadster beyond peradventure of discovery.

An unfenced field suggested deflection from his course, and he was soon bumping over a cornfield in which the stalks still stood. Beyond there was a strip of wood through which he had once followed his own brook. Guiding the halting machine through the trees presented difficulties, but it perched presently on the bank, and then with a last effort plunged down and became a fixed portion of the landscape.

McGillicuddy got ashore, lighted a fresh cigar, and considered his problems philosophically. The road was only a quarter of a mile behind, and soon the hum of a machine warned him that his pursuers were again abroad in quest of him. They were proceeding slowly, and he waited anxiously till they passed the point at which he had swung into the field.

Now that he had hidden the roadster where it might, with good luck, remain undiscovered all winter, home seemed a less hazardous refuge, and McGillicuddy set out for his own acres. Creeping along under the bank, he encountered malevolent briars that scratched his legs viciously, and low branches that seemed to have been distributed at just the proper height to slap him in the face. Finding himself at last under the bridge, he sought firm earth and sat down for rest and meditation.

At several points on his back and shoulders pins seemed to be pricking him. Just under his collar-button his fingers touched something round and hard imbedded in his flesh. His shirt over this point was wet, and this was odd indeed. Further exploration disclosed other moist spots and similar hard lumps. And then it dawned upon McGillicuddy that he was wounded, peppered indeed over a considerable area of his ample back with shot. The thought of it thrilled him. Twice in one night he had been a target for murderous missiles, and yet he lived to tell the tale!

PRESENTLY the silence was broken by the crunching of gravel in the road. Some one was walking toward the bridge, and his recent experiences had taught him caution. The step sounded loudly on the bridge flooring. Against the stars he saw vaguely limned the figure of a man carrying something on his shoulder that bore every appearance of a gun. The officers, believing that he might have hidden himself near the place where they had lost track of him, had left a man behind in the hope of picking him up. So McGillicuddy reasoned, and his logic was sound.

The guard passed and then retraced his steps. McGillicuddy felt moved by every consideration of safety to leave the neighborhood. The lead that had been urged into his system by the guns of his enemies would have to be removed. There was no escaping this conclusion, particularly as his back began to feel sore in those spots where the shot had bitten into him. The guard, weary perhaps of his fruitless patrol, now paused most annoyingly on the bridge and lighted his pipe. As the match flamed McGillicuddy saw a bearded face which he was sure belonged to an unreasonable being with whom closer acquaintance was highly undesirable. He began feeling his way slowly through the willows that bordered the stream. He was making satisfactory progress when he lost his hold, clutched wildly at a branch that cracked under his weight, and rolled like a barrel until he landed in the brook. His descent had created a hateful and fearsome noise, and to add to his discomfort, the water that soaked into him through the broken ice was hideously cold.

"Hey there!" came from the bridge. "Come out o' that!"

McGillicuddy gained the further bank under the impetus of a patter of shot, and crouched behind a log. The guard was already down in the stream, flashing an electric lamp and demanding that a certain person profanely described come out of hiding and surrender.

McGillicuddy had no thought of surrendering. On the contrary, he left the brook and struck out boldly for the open. The booming of the gun was likely to reunite the scattered foe, and McGillicuddy ran as he had never run before. This, to be sure, means no record-breaking speed, for his stage shoes would have been an embarrassment even if they had not been obliged to carry two hundred pounds of human being over a rough pasture. But it had always been McGillicuddy's way to do the business in hand with all his might, and just now there was nothing on his mind except the desire of life and liberty and the continued pursuit of happiness. Old friends who had admired his splendid poise in all emergencies would have marveled to see him trotting over uneven meadows with the quick steps compelled by his short legs and close-buttoned ulster.

A dark blur ahead proved to be the outbuildings of a farm; and tumbling over a fence, he lay quietly behind the barn until he regained his wind. He was in a mood to enjoy peace, but this was a boon not so lightly to be won. A machine was making its way up the lane from the road, and soon, with a distinctness he did not relish, he heard the officers inquiring for him of the awakened householder.

"You aint seen a fat darky round here, have you? Last we saw of him he was headed this way."

With considerable asperity the farmer repudiated the idea that he was harboring a criminal of any race or color. To the best of his knowledge, there wasn't a negro anywhere within twenty miles of his place.

Lying as close to the barn as he could press himself, McGillicuddy followed, by the sounds and occasional flashes of light, the investigations of the hounds of the law. While ransacking the barn, the men got into a row among themselves as to the responsibility for McGillicuddy's escape. One of them was sternly rebuked by the leader for suggesting that the negro they had encountered could hardly be the whisky-runner they were seeking. The man they had been warned to look out for drove a touring car with a New Hampshire tag, and the machine they had poured shot into wasn't built to carry liquid merchandise, and moreover it bore a Connecticut registration. They were tired, as was evidenced by their ill-humor. The guard who had failed to prove a Horatius at the bridge received a severe rating.

"Well, it may have been just a clod slipping down the bank," he said defensively.

"You'd no business to shoot unless you saw something!" snarled the leader. "We stopped and went back for you when we heard the gun, and that coon's too smooth to be caught again."

WHEN they drove away and the household became quiet again, McGillicuddy observed that the stars were paling. While he had kept his bearings through all his vicissitudes, it was one thing to follow the roads and quite another to traverse the same section cross-country. A heavy fog added to his perplexities, and finding that he had passed

the same straw-stack twice, he intrusted himself to the guidance of a fence that seemed to lead in the right direction and trudged bravely on.

The sun crept into view, looking like a great smear of red through the mists. The earth close to fences he found to be rough and overgrown with prickly things, and dogs were abroad in great numbers. One odious creature dashed at him as he was crossing a lane, and was so belligerent that McGillicuddy ran a considerable distance before he got rid of him. He was leaning upon a gate that arrested his progress when a young man coming out of the fog found a black face placidly gazing at him, and departed into the unknown with a yell of fright. Recognizing the alarmed young man as a neighbor's son, McGillicuddy now knew that he was near his own house. He climbed a fence that placed him on his own territory, and in a few minutes had let himself in at the front door.

He went to his room and rang for Ijima. The Japanese boy appeared quickly, looked at McGillicuddy, still in cap and ulster and with his make-up intact save for certain white lines where he had been scratched in his peregrinations, glanced at the bed turned down but not slept in, and bade his master a respectful good morning.

"Please run the bath for me, Ijima," said McGillicuddy in his usual courteous tone. "Then call Dr. Foster and ask him to come over as soon as possible. And you might suggest that he bring his surgical kit—nothing serious, merely a precaution. And then you may serve my usual breakfast here, and please hurry it up. I want my coffee."

"Yezzeh."

"Thank you, Ijima!"

And thus McGillicuddy met Oriental calm and indifference to fate with like qualities as they are occasionally perfected in the Occidental. He took his tub, carefully scrubbing the black from his face, and got into bed.

"WHAT I ought to do," said Dr. Foster, when he had picked six shot out of McGillicuddy's back, "is to tell you to keep your bed for a week, with a couple of nurses to wait on you. But if you really feel that you're up to appearing in vaudeville for positively one night only, I'll have to stand for it. You're likely to feel pretty stiff, but I'll instruct Ijima to rub your legs to minimize the effects of your unusual exercise."

"Thank you, Foster! If I'm alive, I'll appear in the show. By the way, confidences to a physician are—"

Foster laughed aloud as he counted the shot into McGillicuddy's collar-button box.

"Don't be afraid! If the laws of my profession didn't protect you, the fear of being called a liar would! Nobody would ever believe the yarn you've told me!"

McGillicuddy smiled cheerfully. The Doctor remained until his patient went to sleep under the soothing influence of Ijima's massage.

When McGillicuddy wakened at five o'clock, he found Phil Watson established by the window, where he had been sitting since noon.

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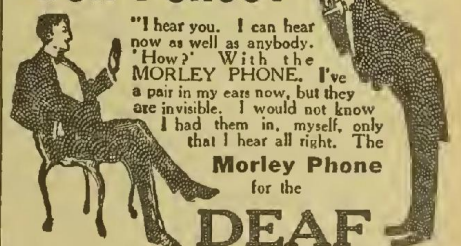
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to come over," said McGillicuddy, sitting up and stretching himself.

"Foster told me to hang around and take your temperature when you woke up. So here goes!"

"How ridiculous!" said McGillicuddy. "I'm feeling fine!"

"Normal!" declared Watson after the mercury had registered.

"Of course, Phil, I kept rather late hours last night, and took a little more exercise than usual, but the dancing I've been doing put me in condition for anything."

He got out of bed and did his dance, humming the tune, and sang a verse of his song.

"Not even hoarse!" he exclaimed jubilantly, and sat down on the bed. "I thought sure the night-air would do for my voice. It sounds all right, doesn't it?"

"Yes; you look as fit as a fiddle. But see here, Roger, you don't want to fool around at night with your face blacked up. A negro whisky-runner was shot and killed over near Stamford by Federal officers last night. He was a chap they'd been trying to pick up for some time, and all the sheriffs and police in this part of the State were watching for him."

"Deplorable," murmured McGillicuddy sympathetically. "How's the guest I left on your doorstep?"

"Oh, she's wonderful! She told us all about her infatuation for her aunt's chauffeur, and how she thought it would be terribly romantic to run away with him, but you know the rest. We drove her over to the Rangeley's this morning after fixing up a plausible story for her to tell. She's perfectly charming, and Jean's crazy about her. The girl lost her head; that's all; but it's on straight now. You may be sure she'll never be so foolish again. The fact is, she's in love with Ned Rangeley, but forgot it for a day or two. The Rangeleys are very conservative and if they knew—oh, Lord!"

"But if she decides to marry Ned, she must confess the whole business to him," said McGillicuddy soberly. "You'd better tell her that!"

"Oh, she's as fine as gold, and you may trust her to do the square thing. But there's one embarrassment: She's keen, as she should be, to reward you, assuming you to be a rather stout colored person who works for his living. Your disguise fooled her completely."

"She had a narrow escape; I'll say that! That chap she was running away with is a bad sort, with a devil of a temper. She's well rid of him."

"He tried to kill you; I don't overlook that! Do you realize, Roger, that at this very minute you might be a dead man!"

"The thought has occurred to me," McGillicuddy assented; "but after you've been shot at a few times, you really don't mind it. It's like any other habit."

AFTER Watson left, McGillicuddy went through his act half a dozen times, laying stress on the dance to limber up. His shoulders and back were slightly uncomfortable from the adhesive plaster where Foster dressed his wounds, but otherwise he had never felt better.

To conserve his strength as much as possible, he had Ijima drive him to the country club in a touring car he kept

as part of his establishment. When his turn came, he faced a capacity house that welcomed him rapturously. His trousers had fared badly in his wanderings, but this only added to their effectiveness; and if the shoes had shrunk a trifle from their frequent immersions in ice-water, McGillicuddy's dance suffered in nowise from this fact. The dance was an artistic thing as Simms had taught it, but McGillicuddy brought to it now an abandon, a droll insouciance that he had never commanded in his rehearsals. The curtain rose six times, that he might bow his thanks for applause long continued and unquestionably sincere.

He went to the locker-room to clean up and change his clothes, and when the last act was concluded, he found himself sought by all Cornford, anxious to praise an exhibition which everyone said was a challenge to professional vaudeville.

They were taking out the chairs to make ready for the dance that was to follow when Jean cornered him.

"You old dear!" she cried. "I never was so proud in my life! Papa came, and will be grabbing you in a minute, but I must have just a word with you first. These people don't know what a hero you are! It was perfectly glorious the way you saved that dear girl! The Rangeleys brought her to the show of course. And Ned is very happy, you may be sure; but if it hadn't been for you—"

"It was a mere trifle," said McGillicuddy. "I suppose there's no danger of the young lady—er—recognizing me?"

THIS question, which had not occurred to him before, filled him with apprehensions—apprehensions that were destined to immediate realization.

Across the room Ned Rangeley waved his hand and started toward McGillicuddy with a tall young lady who, even as transformed by her ball-gown, he knew to be the girl who had tearfully confided in him the night before. She was smiling and radiant now, and after Rangeley had presented Miss Grace Trimble and McGillicuddy had given her every opportunity to ignore their earlier meeting, she laughed into his eyes, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him on the cheek.

"I've told Ned everything!" she said. "But how can I ever thank you?"

"It's for me to do the thanking!" said Rangeley.

"You embarrass me terribly," said McGillicuddy, "when you speak of thanks."

"My God, that scoundrel might have killed you!" cried Rangeley. "Grace says the bullet just skimmed your ear!"

"Last night wasn't my night to die," replied McGillicuddy, smiling. "But here's my check for that hundred. I lose, because I found it necessary to change my raiment and my complexion between the rehearsal and the show tonight."

"It was my fault, then," said the girl, "for putting you to so much trouble, and I ought to pay the bet."

"Not at all," said McGillicuddy, pressing the check into Rangeley's hand. "Our drive, Miss Trimble, was the least exciting incident of a busy night, and you are in no way responsible for my losing the bet. I'm starving to death; let's have our refreshment together!"